

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Harold and Marion Ruth Residence

other name/site number: 24YL1630

2. Location

street & number: 111 Emerald Drive

not for publication: na

vicinity: na

city/town: Billings

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Yellowstone

code: 111

zip code: 59105

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency or bureau

(☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register

☐ see continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the National Register

☐ see continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register

☐ see continuation sheet

☐ removed from the National Register

☐ see continuation sheet

☐ other (explain):

5. Classification

Ownership of Property:	Private	Number of Resources within Property	
Category of Property:	Buildings	Contributing	Noncontributing
Number of contributing resources previously		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> building(s)
listed in the National Register:	n/a	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
Name of related multiple property listing:	n/a	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> structures
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
		<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling = House

Current Functions:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling = House

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

OTHER: Western Ranch

Materials:

foundation: Concrete

walls: Wood (Board & Batten)

roof: Wood shingle

other: Flagstone

Narrative Description

The residence is located on a sandstone cliff overlooking Alkali Creek and Swords Park about one mile above the creek's confluence with the Yellowstone River near MetraPark in Billings Heights. The house is situated between the Billings Bench Water Association Canal (24YL161) and the cliffs, which are comprised of Eagle Sandstone. Eagle Sandstone formed about 65 million years ago when the area was part of a barrier island on the Colorado Seaway. As the waters of the inland sea retreated to the east approximately 80 million years ago, it exposed the sandstone which dominates the Billings area landscape today, serving as a very visual reminder of the area's ancient geography.¹ Alkali Creek was well-known to Montana's prehistoric residents and functioned both as a bison procurement area (because of the high cliffs bordering the creek's valley) and as a travel corridor to the bench lands north of Billings.² There are several archaeological sites in the vicinity of the property with occupations dating back at least 4,000 years. Two sites (24YL1606 and 24YL1607) are located within the view shed of the residence. The historic property's original owner, Harold Ruth, was a history buff and a prominent statewide promoter of western art. The property's proximity to the ditch (the land transaction included a share in the ditch company), its view of Kelly Mountain and Black Otter Trail (24YL1551), the Boot Hill Cemetery (24YL755) and its vantage point over the old Coulson – Fort Benton Road that traveled up Alkali Creek beginning in the 1870s undoubtedly influenced his decision to acquire the property. A historic photograph of the home site taken by L. A. Huffman in 1883 shows the building site as grasslands and sandstone outcrops almost completely devoid of any substantial vegetation.³ Today, the property is heavily forested with cottonwood and conifer trees and dense undergrowth consisting of native grasses, riparian-type vegetation, willows, shrubs, and Russian olives. Sacrifice Cliff is visible to the southeast of the property.

The Harold and Marion Ruth Residence consists of two features: a residence and a dog kennel.

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Residence (one contributing building)

The residence is a 1-story Western Ranch-style residence with a gable roof. It is oriented northwest to southeast, overlooks Alkali Creek, and faces south toward Airport Road and Black Otter Trail (24YL1551). The building rests on a concrete foundation and has a tuck-under garage facing southeast onto a large paved parking area. The roof is sheathed in wood shingles with exposed rafters and the walls are clad in vertical board-and-batten siding throughout. There is an interior stone chimney and a decorative pyramid-roof enclosed cupola to the west of the chimney. The roof is extended to shelter a porch and is supported by square posts with decorative brackets. The porch has a flagstone floor and runs approximately half the length of the house on the façade. An enclosed porch is attached to the northwest elevation of the house. It has a gable roof with an extended purlin on the west gable-end and is enclosed by a low wall clad in board-and-batten siding with the same type of siding on the northwest gable-end. The porch is screened-in and there is a exterior stone chimney on the northwest corner. Entrance to the porch is gained through doors on southeast (opening onto the exterior porch) and on the north opening onto a brick-floored patio in the backyard.⁴ An entry is located on the north elevation of the house and opens to the west onto the porch. It has a wood door with a single fixed light and a storm addition. The deck of the porch is also comprised of flagstone. The primary entry to the residence is reached through the open-air porch on the façade and it opens to the west onto the porch. It has a wood "Dutch" type door with three fixed lights. A stained glass window is located to the right of the entry and faces south.

On the left façade (left of the entry) and opening onto the open-air porch, there are two large fixed light picture windows flanked by single-light casement windows. Two combination fixed-light and single-light casement windows are located on the left façade. A gable-roof extension faces north on the right of the rear façade. It has a gable roof with exposed rafters sheathed in wood shingles and the walls are clad in board-and-batten siding. A window on the extension is located on the west elevation to the left of the enclosed porch. It has fixed light flanked by fixed light casement windows. On the façade of the extension are two casement windows – on the right and the left. The gable roof has an extended purlin. Central to the rear façade is a combination fixed light picture window flanked by casement windows. To the right of that window are two combination fixed and casement windows.

The east end of the house is slightly canted to the southeast. A band of six windows is located on the façade and are partially obscured by vegetation. They consist of three fixed windows and three casement windows; all have decorative lattice creating diamond patterns on them. On the rear façade, there is a combination fixed and casement window central to the canted section. The tuck-under garage has two bays each with roll-up type doors and is located underneath the canted section of the residence. An entry is located adjacent to the right garage bay on the right. It has a single-light wood door with a storm addition. A shed-roof balcony with exposed rafters is located directly above the garage. The floor joists are exposed and the deck of the balcony is wood. The balcony is partially enclosed by a low decorative wood wall. Entry is gained to it from the house by a door centrally located on the east elevation. It has a wood door with a single fixed light and a storm addition. It is flanked by single light casement windows.

The residence is located on a small hill at the base of the BBWA Ditch embankment. The house is reached by flagstone steps with a steel railing on the south added within the last fifteen years. The residence is surrounded by mature landscaping some of which was planted by Harold Ruth shortly after the house was constructed. It includes Mugo pines, junipers, ivies, cottonwoods, yuccas, and other vegetation designed to accentuate the house and provide shade in the summer months. In 1968, Ruth salvaged portions of buildings that were demolished in downtown Billings. Three exterior kick plates salvaged from the Commercial Hotel are mounted in wood frames and delineate a portion of the backyard next to the backyard patio; each panel has a raised floral motif.⁵ A marble memorial stele is located behind the kick plates. It reads "Presented by/ the Women of/ Ku Klux Klan No. 7/ May 30, 1928." A 5' x 3' concrete sidewalk slab salvaged from

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in front of Olive Warren's Lucky Diamond bordello at 2512 Minnesota Avenue is located on the south side of the parking area; the slab is stamped "Olive Warren."⁶

Dog Kennel (one contributing structure)

The structure is a dog kennel located approximately 100 yards east of the residence. A duck and pheasant hunter, Ruth raised Black Labradors for forty years and was a founding member of the Montana Retriever Club in the late 1940s. The kennel is oriented east and west and opens to the east. The kennel is comprised of a concrete block building with three dog runs located on the east side of the structure. The building has a low shed roof with exposed rafters and is sheathed in rolled asphalt. There are three openings on the east side that allowed access by the dogs into the runs. The runs have low concrete block walls and the upper portions are comprised of chain link. There are chain link gates at the ends of each run. Hog wire has been placed over the top of all three runs. There is an entry on the south side of the kennel that has a wood door.

Integrity:

The site exhibits excellent integrity of design, workmanship, materials, and feeling. Prominent Billings architect Everett Terrell designed the house for Harold and Marion Ruth in 1956. A review of the original plans for the house reveal that there have been NO changes to the design, configuration or materials since the house was constructed. It is a representative example of a Western Ranch-style residence with the design modified to suit the tastes of the Ruth's. A western history buff, Ruth likely specified the house be not only aesthetically pleasing, but also suggestive of its place in what was then a rural area and its place in the American West. Indeed, the house resembles a 19th century ranch bunkhouse with its low profile, low-pitched gable roof, stone fireplace, and harmony with the surrounding environment. Since 1956 as the landscaping and vegetation around the site has matured, the house has become compatible to its environment and exhibits an architectural design that evokes the Western Ranch style at its finest. While the setting outside its immediate surroundings have changed as Billings Heights has expanded since the 1950s, the house still retains its rural flavor. The building appears in 2006 exactly as it did upon its completion in 1956 and still represents the tastes of its original owners, Harold and Marion Ruth.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A & C
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a
Significant Person(s): n/a
Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Areas of Significance: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT;
ARCHITECTURE
Period(s) of Significance: 1956
Significant Dates: 1956
Architect/Builder: Ralph Cushing and Everett Terrell

Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary:

Constructed in 1956, the Harold and Marion Ruth Residence represents a period when Billings and Billings Heights experienced unprecedented growth in the wake of the World War II. The residence is representative of a process where people increasingly moved from the city into the suburbs and outlying areas around the city as economic prosperity and improved transportation allowed them to relocate to areas of their choosing. The residence was designed by architect Everett Terrell specifically for this site and is representative of the type of upper end Western Ranch-style residences that were constructed in and around Billings during the 1950s to celebrate the city's booming economy and its historical connection to the Old West. The residence retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship and has not been altered since its construction. The Harold and Marion Ruth Residence is eligible for the NRHP under Criteria A and C.

Historic Context:

The area around the Harold and Marion Ruth Residence was well-known to Native Americans for thousands of years and has an unusually high density of pre-contact archaeological sites. The creek provided a natural travel corridor between the Yellowstone River and the bench lands leading to the Musselshell and Missouri rivers. As early as 4,000 years ago, the area's aboriginal inhabitants ran bison off the sandstone cliffs bordering the Alkali Creek valley and processed the animals on the creek bottom. The Billings Bison Trap site is located about one mile southeast of the property. Two bison processing sites (24YL1606 and 24YL1607) are located directly opposite the residence at the Airport Road-Alkali Creek Road intersection. Two archaeological sites have also been documented (but not officially recorded) just to the southwest of the residence's property and the cliff upon which the nearby Gallery Building (built by Harold Ruth in 1968) is rumored to be located on a bison jump. Undoubtedly, the sandstone escarpment that delineates a portion of the Ruth's driveway may also have served some purpose for Native Americans; the base of the cliff has not yet been investigated for archaeological remains. During the historic period, the area was frequented by both the Blackfeet and the Crow Indians. The area, however, is generally recognized as being within Crow territory.⁷

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The first recorded Euro-American description of the Billings area is credited to William Clark. In July 1806, Clark and eleven others, including Sacajawea and her newborn son, Pomp, undertook to explore the Gallatin and Yellowstone Valleys. On July 24, 1806, the party passed through the area now occupied by Billings. Clark was clearly awed by the abundant wildlife living along the river.

Saw emenc [sic] number of deer, elk and buffalow on the banks. Some beaver . . . [For] me to mention or give an estimate of the different Spcies [sic] of wild animals on this river particularly Buffalow, Elk, Antelopes and wolves would be incredible.

Clark also noted the presence of a recently abandoned Crow Sun Dance lodge on a large island in the Yellowstone. The captain detailed Nathaniel Pryor, George Shannon, Richard Windsor, and Hugh Hall to drive the company's horses overland on the south side of the Yellowstone, while the rest of the party proceeded downriver in cottonwood canoes to rendezvous with Meriwether Lewis at the mouth of the Yellowstone.⁸

Even before the Lewis and Clark Expedition returned to St. Louis in September 1806, it met men ascending the Missouri River with the intention of trapping beaver in the Yellowstone River Country. Missouri Fur Company actor Manuel Lisa established a small trading post on the Yellowstone at the mouth of the Big Horn River in 1807. Although abandoned in, a succession of trading posts followed it between 1821 and 1876. In late 1837, a band of Crow Indians were felled by small pox near the existing MetraPark. According to Crow legend, two young warriors found the village stricken by the terrible disease when they returned from a war expedition. Despondent and frustrated because they could do nothing to alter the course of the disease, they dressed in their finest clothing and mounted a snow-white horse. Riding double and singing their death-songs, they rode the blindfolded horse over a cliff [Kelly Mountain] and landed at what is now the eastern end of the Yellowstone County Fairgrounds. The location then became known as The Place Where the White Horse Went Down.⁹

The Yellowstone River near the mouth of Alkali Creek was well-known to fur trappers and traders from 1807 onward. In 1822, Blackfeet Indians ambushed and killed Missouri Fur Company trappers Robert Jones and Michael Immel along with five others near the mouth of Alkali Creek about one-half mile southeast of the residence. The US Army's successful campaign against the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho during the winter of 1877 made the Yellowstone Valley in this area attractive for settlers and entrepreneurs. In 1877, Perry W. McAdow, his brother William, a man named Freth, and former trapper Henry Keiser established a small settlement on the Yellowstone and named it Coulson after the owners of a steamboat line they hoped to attract to the area. The McAdow brothers established a store, sawmill, and hotel at the site about one mile southeast of this historic property. The settlement flourished as a river port and stagecoach station until about 1882. Eventually the community boasted a brewery, school, newspaper, post office, and Chicago Jane's notorious brothel. Coulson was a tough town as evidenced by the nearby boot hill cemetery (24YL755), which contain the remains of at least forty individuals.¹⁰

As the Northern Pacific Railway pushed its way up the Yellowstone in 1881, railroad land speculators scouted in advance for suitable sites for towns to serve the line. In the summer of 1882, the NPRR's Minnesota & Montana Land & Improvement Company platted a city on an alkali flat about two miles north of Coulson. The company christened the city Billings after former NPRR president Frederick Billings. The Northern Pacific reached Billings in August 1882. The new city, however, was not without its difficulties. Railroad officials accused MMLI agent Heman Clark of gouging potential settlers who wanted to settle on the company's land, driving them away to cheaper land. The city was also plagued by streets that turned into quagmires during rains or after spring thaw and complaints about the pervasive bad smell emanating

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from the city dump northeast of town. Wannabe vigilantes didn't help things much in 1891, when they string up a man on a lamppost next to the NPRR tracks, who was accused of murdering a popular bartender. Despite the drawbacks, Billings steadily grew through the late 19th century. By the end of 1882, it boasted a population of 1,000 people. By 1900, its population had grown threefold to 3,221 people.¹¹

Billings was fortunate in being located at the right place at the right time. The city boomed during the first two decades of the 20th century. The fertile river bottoms made the Yellowstone Valley around Billings a paradise for farmers, especially after the completion of the Big Ditch (24YL664) in 1883 and the Billings Bench Water Association Canal (24YL161) in 1904. In 1905, the US Reclamation Service (USRS) established the Huntley Irrigation Project about fifteen miles northeast of the residence. The project was among the first and most successful of the USRS's early western projects. In 1909, the federal government enacted the Enlarged Homestead Act. That act, which provided 320 acres to any person willing to improve and farm it, attracted thousands of dry land farmers to south central Montana between 1909 and 1918. Billings quickly became an important trading and transportation center, especially after the arrival of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad in 1894 and the Great Northern Railway's line from Great Falls in 1908. Billings was an important transportation hub with access to three transcontinental railroads. Billings also profited by the presence of a Great Western Sugar refinery in the city, that processed sugar beets harvested in the surrounding area.¹²

Although hard hit by the collapse of the Homestead Boom in 1919 and the resulting economic depression during the early 1920s, Billings survived because of its status as a transportation center on the northern Great Plains. Not only was it served by three railroads, but it also relied on interstate highways US Highway 10 and US Highway 87 to provide better access to markets throughout the region. In 1929, the Yale Oil Company constructed a refinery at Billings and manufactured gasoline, which was sold throughout the region. The discovery of rich oil fields in southern Montana and northern Wyoming also provided a steady source of revenue to the area, especially after Carter Oil and Conoco built refineries in the Magic City in the 1940s. The discovery and exploitation of oil in the Williston Basin in the 1950s had a profound effect on Billings as it became a significant refining center and pipeline hub. Large coal companies operating in the Colstrip area made Billings their headquarters. The boom caused by the oil industry influenced the expansion of Logan International Airport in the 1960s and 1970s and made the Magic City a transportation hub with a trade port and many other distribution and trans-loading facilities. The city also benefited from the presence of two major hospitals, a significant commercial business district on the west side of town, and proximity to eastern Montana and northern Wyoming. In 1996, historian Michael Malone wrote:

The new Billings economy continues to rest upon traditional energy, agricultural marketing, and tourist travel bases; for instance, the city's three refineries now process well over five million barrels of crude oil daily and have an annual payroll of over \$165 million.

The diverse economy and its strategic location have combined to provide Billings a relatively steady rate of growth and evolving significance as Montana's largest metro area have confirmed the dreams of the city's founders.¹³

Much of the Billings Heights area is located in Section 27, T1N, R26E on a bench to the northeast of the Clark's Fork Bottom and the original Billings townsite. While Section 27 was included within the 44 million acre land grant obtained by the Northern Pacific Railway Company in July 1864, the even-numbered sections surrounding it were settled beginning in 1881. The semi-arid bench, like its neighbor Huntley Bench to the northeast, was also covered by "sagebrush, cactus, and rattlesnakes." Between 1881 and 1899, there were sixteen homestead entries in the township. But it was not until after the completion of the Billings Bench Water Association's main canal in 1904 that settlement of the Billings Heights area

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began in earnest. From 1902 to 1912, more than half of the 63 homestead entries were made in the area. In 1912, the Northern Pacific Railway completed its 13-mile Billings & Central Montana "farmers" railroad (24YL1592) between Billings and the New Holland settlement northeast of town. The railroad passed through what would become Billings Heights. In 1912, the county road now known as Main Street was incorporated into the Yellowstone Trail, a 3,673-mile conglomeration of county roads that connected Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts with Seattle. That road was known as U.S. Highways 10 and 12 in 1926. The 1943 Water Resources Survey shows no townsite development in what is now the Heights, perhaps indicating that it was still largely rural with most of the agricultural operations reliant on irrigation. In the early 1950s, however, the Montana Highway Commission improved the route in conjunction with the replacement of the Yellowstone River bridge at Huntley. The improvement of the roadway, the post-war economic boom, and a renaissance in automobile travel, caused a profound change in what had hitherto been a largely rural area.¹⁴

Beginning in 1958, Billings Heights began appearing under that name in the Billings city directories. Although not a part of the city, many city residents relocated there after World War II as the older residents in the area began subdividing their properties. Many of the new arrivals, moreover, were employed at the nearby oil refineries. A housing shortage in Billings compelled them to look elsewhere for affordable housing. Indeed, along Lake Elmo Road and on Bench Boulevard in 2006, many residences are relatively small single-family Minimal Traditional or Ranch style homes built during the post-war boom in Billings. When the Harold and Marion Ruth Residence was constructed in 1956, commercial enterprises along U.S. Highway 10/12 (redesignated Main Street by 1958) consisted of businesses that were primarily automobile-oriented, including nine motels, five restaurants, and seven service stations, along with grocery stores, trailer courts, a hardware store, and 29 residences. Harold and Marion Ruth's relocation to Billings Heights in 1956 was part of a larger trend as industry expanded in the city and many sought suburban areas in locations that were still largely rural. When they moved into their new home in 1956, they had no neighbors living in proximity to them. It would not be until 1958, that they gained a neighbor at the end of their private driveway. For many years, Billings Heights had a reputation as the fastest growing metropolitan area in Montana. In 1960, the Heights appears as a distinct entity in the U.S. Census records with a population of 4,802 people. By 1970, however, the Heights was included in the Billings metro area for census purposes. Today, Main Street in Billings Heights is one busiest streets in the state and it serves a population of well over 20,000 people.¹⁵

Harold and Marion Ruth

Harold and Marion Ruth moved to Billings at the beginning of the Great Depression in August 1932 shortly after marrying and graduating from the University of Montana in Missoula. Born in Guyman, Oklahoma in June 1908, Ruth moved to Halstead, Kansas with his parents in 1910. After graduating from high school in Halstead in 1927, he attended Southwestern University in Winfield, Kansas for a short time before transferring to the University of Montana in Missoula, where he graduated with a degree in Business Administration in 1931. He married Marion Cline in 1931. Marion was the daughter of Polson area entrepreneur Joseph H. Cline. Cline relocated to Polson with his family from Concordia, Kansas in 1910. In 1911, he negotiated a deal with the Salish Indians and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to construct an electricity-powered flour mill on the Flathead Reservation a few miles south of Polson. Because there was not enough electricity to efficiently power the machinery or provide extra power to nearby Polson, Cline and his chief engineer, F. F. Faucett, began plans to build a hydroelectric plant on Hellroaring Creek about five miles from the mill. Cline formed the Mission Range Power Company in 1915 to build the power plant, which was completed in 1916. The plant provided enough electricity to run the power mill with the excess sold to markets in Polson, Ronan, and Pablo. Cline sold the operation in 1928 and the flour mill burned down in 1929. Marion Cline graduated from the University of Montana in 1931 with a degree in music education. During the depths of the Great Depression in September 1932, Harold and Marion Ruth moved to Billings.¹⁶

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Harold opened a insurance agency in the Electric Building on North Broadway in late 1932. Called Ruth Insurance Service Company, he sold fire and auto insurance for several years at that location before moving his office in 1954 to a new site on North 27th Street next door to an architectural firm operated by Ralph Cushing and Everett Terrell. An active businessman and local entrepreneur, Harold was a charter member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce of Billings. He also invested in real estate in and around Billings and owned rental properties in the Magic City. From 1942 to 1946 he served in the US Navy before returning to Billings. He was also an founder and active member of the Montana Retriever Club and raised Black Labrador retrievers for forty years. In 1955, he hired the Billing architectural firm of Cushing & Terrell to design a house to be constructed on a property he had acquired for \$680 from Billings contractor Barry O'Leary in June 1953. A contractor began work on the house in late 1955 and Harold and Marion moved into it in Autumn 1956. In an article published in the February 3, 1963 *Billings Gazette*, reporter Kathryn Wright described the house

You approach the house via a winding tree-bordered private road On the north side of the road are kennels for the Ruths' prize-winning Labrador retrievers. . . . The road runs along the top of a cliff overlooking Alkali Creek, a stream meandering into a rock-lined pool at the cliff's foot. Against the Cliffside are barn and corral, summer home for the Ruths' horses You drive along admiring the scenic grandeur . . . the you see the home that is a retreat and a resort all built into one structure. . . . It's a rambling two-level house of random width, cedars boards and battens, stained with silver-flecked sage green. Its color and shape compliment its setting.

Wright went on in great detail describing the interior of the house and concluded "But its more than a house. It's a mountain cabin beside a stream. It's a resort away from the hustle and bustle of city life. It's 'out of this world.' But the Ruths are quick to add, 'Its only seven minutes from town.'" During the late 1950s and 1960s, the Ruth's were tireless promoters of western art, with many paintings and bronzes by established and up-and-coming artists displayed in the house. In 1964 they opened the Brown Barn art gallery in an old barn that Harold relocated to the intersection of Main Street and Lake Elmo Drive in Billings Heights. The Brown Barn closed in 1966. In 1968 they opened Gallery '85 on Emerald Drive just a short distance from their house. Harold and Marion operated it until 1977 when they sold it to Chuck and Caroline Gainan. In 1962, Harold formed a business partnership with Melvin Von Hess. The men conducted business as Von Hess – Ruth Insurance on 1st Avenue North until Harold retired in 1970. Harold died in the house in September 1991 and ownership of it passed to his wife, Marion. She died in March 2004 and ownership of the property passed to Harry and Sara Axline in September of that year. Sara is Harold and Marion's daughter.¹⁷

Western Ranch Style

The years following World War II saw profound changes to American life and culture. A booming economy and increasing middle class affluence after the war, caused a significant rise in the number of new homeowners in the country. Unlike their parents, however, most did not live in the cities and, instead, purchased homes in suburbs that lay outside the urban limits for which they easy automobile access. The suburban homes reflected the new domesticity of post-war prosperity, but were not usually ostentatious like their Queen Anne, Craftsman, and Colonial Revival predecessors. Instead, the residences were relatively small with a minimum of decorative elements that reflected the prosperity of the times, but did not overtly boast about it. The initial dominant architectural style was the Minimal Traditional style residence that originated during the depths of the Great Depression in the 1930s. By the early 1950s, though, Minimal Traditional-style homes were being rapidly replaced by a new style that not only represented the continued affluence of the decade, but also the increased spending power of the American middle class and the desire for more space in and around the houses. The Ranch style best represented a significant change in the evolution of American architectural tastes at that time.¹⁸

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The Ranch style originated in California and had its roots in the Spanish Colonial style of the American Southwest. Popularized by San Diego architect Cliff May in *Sunset* magazine beginning about 1935, it was a hybrid of the “Hispanic Rancheria home style with elements of Modernism” intended to blend the hominess of the Rancheria style with the sterility of Moderne. One author wrote that the “Ranch was a modern house with touches of Western influence and an open floor plan suggesting family, entertaining, heritage, and the future.” Post-War prosperity caused the Ranch style to gain in popularity in the United States, especially in the American West where the predominance of the automobile and generally cheaper land prices and larger lots easily accommodated the larger lots required for rambling Ranch-style residences. The sprawling designs of the houses reflected a new emphasis on open interior space, but also maintained a connection to the outdoors with an open front porch, screened-in porches, patios, and large picture windows. Horizontal plans and low-pitched gable or hipped roofs sheathed in wood shingles were also common to Ranch houses. Indeed, architecture critic Alan Hess wrote that the style “represented a whole range of powerful images and myths: new possibilities, rugged individualism, self-determination, ease and convenience, informality, wide open spaces. The Ranch was . . . a product of the West . . .” All this combined to make Ranch Houses popular with middle class American families. The houses were generally one-story with an asymmetrical plan that often incorporated an attached garage – one symbol of the decade’s prosperity and a measure of success for the dwelling’s owner. Long, low rooflines with low-pitched roofs, and exteriors of stucco, brick or wood are common to the style. Ranch houses displayed moderate to wide eave overhangs that were sometimes supported by decorative roof supports. Also included were ribbon windows and large picture windows in the living area. Partially enclosed courtyards or patios were also common features of Ranch-style houses. Interior spaces also included vaulted ceilings with exposed beams, and simple and open floor plans that blended functional spaces. The Harold and Marion Ruth Residence exhibit all the features common to Ranch style homes, including sprawling asymmetrical one-story design, maximum use of windows to provide interior lighting, attached garage, low-pitched roof with overhanging eaves supported by decorative roof posts, enclosed patio, tuck-under garage, and ribbon windows. Additional features incorporated into the design of the residence that is typical to Ranch houses is the simple, open floor plan with vaulted ceilings displaying exposed beams. Writer Katherine Samon called the Ranch-style the post World War II “American dream house,” which in the case of the Ruth Residence was true. The Ruth Residence is an excellent example of the Ranch style that embodies all of the characteristics typical of the design and incorporates features significant to how the Ruth’s wanted to portray not only their own ideals.¹⁹

Conclusion

The Harold and Marion Ruth Residence is a remarkable of a mid-twentieth century Western Ranch-style residence. It ties to the economic and social expansion the post-World War II Billings when economic prosperity and the automobile made possible the exodus of many of the city’s residents to the rural areas surrounding the Magic City. The residence and dog kennel are significant representatives of not only the lives of the property’s original owners, but are also expressive of the Western Ranch style. There have no changes to the exterior of the residence since its construction in 1956.

Endnotes

1. David Alt and Donald W. Hyndman, *Roadside Geology of Montana*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing, 1991), 187.
2. Blain Fandrich, “Airport Road: A Cultural Resource Inventory Along Montana Highway 3 From Main Street to Sky Ranch Drive in Billings, Montana,” Ethnoscience Inc. for HKM Engineering, (August 2002), 14; Stephen A. Aaberg, et al., “Alkali Creek Road Class III Cultural Resource Survey and Evaluative Testing Results, Yellowstone County, Montana,” Aaberg Cultural Resource Consulting Service for HKM Engineering, 2005, 38.

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3. Photograph, "Jerline Twelve Freight Outfit," L. A. Huffman Collection, Catalog no. 981-248, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.
4. Current owner Harry Axline constructed the patio in 2005 to provide a pleasant outdoor area in the backyard and to keep the family dogs from tracking mud into the house. The addition of the patio does not detract from the overall integrity of the residence, however, because patios were common elements of typical Ranch houses.
5. Harold Ruth salvaged other components from historic buildings slated for demolition in downtown Billings and incorporated them in the design of the nearby Gallery '85 Building in 1968.
6. Kathryn N. Wright, "Concrete with a Past." *Billings Gazette*, no date.
7. Personal communication with Stephen Aaberg, October 19, 2006.
8. Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Definitive Journals of Lewis & Clark: Over the Rockies to St. Louis*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2002), 217-219.
9. Merrill G. Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, (Helena: State Publishing, 1942), 47, 48; Mark H. Brown, *The Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 196), 86-88; Glenda Clay Bradshaw, comp., *Montana's Historical Highway Markers*, (Helena: Montana Historical Society, 1999), 93.
10. Brown, *Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 61-63, 220, 356; Don Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing, 1999), 356, 357; Myrtle E. Cooper, *From Tent Town to City: A Chronological History of Billings, Montana*. (Billings: The Author, 1981), 2, 12, 15, 18).
11. Brown, *Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 358; Spritzer, *Roadside History*, 358; Cooper, *Tent Town to City*, 1, 2, 6, 11, 26; Karen Stevens and Dee Ann Redman, *Billings A to Z*, (Billings: The Friends of the Library, 2000), 88.
12. Spritzer, *Roadside History*, 359, 368; Cooper, *Tent Town to City*, 29, 42; Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, Rev ed. (Seattle: University of Washington, 1991), 238.
13. Spritzer, *Roadside History*, 359; Stevens and Redman, *Billings*, 88, 92; Anneke-Jan Boden, *Billings: The First 100 Years*, (Norfolk VA: The Donning Co., 1982), 139-140, 169-170; Michael P. Malone, *Montana: A Contemporary Profile*, (Helena: American & World Geographic, 1996), 45-48.
14. Jon Axline, Cultural Resource Inventory and Assessment: Safety Improvements – West of Huntley [STPHS 56788(6)], Report prepared for the Montana Department of Transportation (2005), 7-8, 13-14; Malone, et al., *Montana*, 173; Alice A. Ridge and John Wm. Ridge, *Introducing the Yellowstone Trail: A Good Road from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound*, (Altoona, WI: Yellowstone Trail Publishers, 2000), 82; Harold A. Meeks, *On the Road to Yellowstone: The Yellowstone Trail and American Highways, 1900-1930*, (Missoula: Pictorial Histories, 2000), 106, 109, 112; State Engineer's Office, *Maps Showing the Irrigated Area in Yellowstone County by Source of Supply*, (Billings: Billings Commercial Club, 1943), np.
15. Billings City Directories, 1950-1995; U.S. Census Records, 1950-1970; Stevens and Redman, *Billings*, 63.

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16. Obituary: Harold Ruth, *Billings Gazette*, 17 September 1991; U.S. Census Records 1910-1930; J. F. McAlear, *The Fabulous Flathead: The Story of the Development of Montana's Flathead Indian Reservation*, (Polson: The Reservation Pioneers, 1962), 105-107; Paul Fugleberg, *Proud Heritage: An Illustrated History of Lake County, the Lower Flathead, Mission, and Jocko Valleys*, (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company, 1997), 123; Obituary: Marion Cline Ruth, *Billings Gazette*, 5 March 2004.

17. Harold Ruth; Marion Cline Ruth; Billings City Directories, 1932-2004; Harold and Marion Ruth Interviews by Jon Axline, 1976 - 2003; Deed Book 469: 369; Drawings, "A Residence for Harold and Marion Ruth," CTA Architects, March 3, 1956; Kathryn Wright. "'Out of This World' - 7 Minutes From Town." *Billings Gazette* (February 3, 1963).

18. Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 477, 479; Ranch-style House, www.Wikipedia.com; Katherine Ann Samon, *Ranch House Style*, (New York: Clarkson Potter, 2003), 21; Alan Hess, *Ranch House*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 11-13.

19. McAlester, *American Houses*, 477, 479; Wikipedia; Samon, *Ranch House*, 6, 12; Hess, *Ranch House*, 11, 12, 14, 17.

Harold & Marion Ruth Residence

Name of Property

Yellowstone County, Montana

County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 2.8 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing
12 695507 5075331

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 27, T1N, R26E

Verbal Boundary Description

The site is located at the western end of Emerald Drive in Billings Heights, just off Lake Elmo Road. The legal location for the site is Tract 2, COS 2592 in the S $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 27, T1N, R26E. The entire property encompasses 2.814 acres. For the purposes of this document, the site is delineated by the Billings Bench Water Association main canal embankment on the north, the sandstone cliffs overlooking Swords Park and Alkali Creek on the south and a barbed wire fence delineating the property on the west. The property is reached by a narrow private lane that is an extension of Emerald Drive. Therefore, the boundaries of the parking area provides the property boundary on the east.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, based on legally recorded boundary lines, to include the land surrounding the building that has been historically associated with the building and conveys the property's historic setting.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jon Axline
organization: _____ date: November 13, 2006
street & number: _____ telephone: _____
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59602

Property Owner

name/title: Harry & Sara Axline
street & number: _____ telephone: _____
city or town: Billings state: MT zip code: 59105

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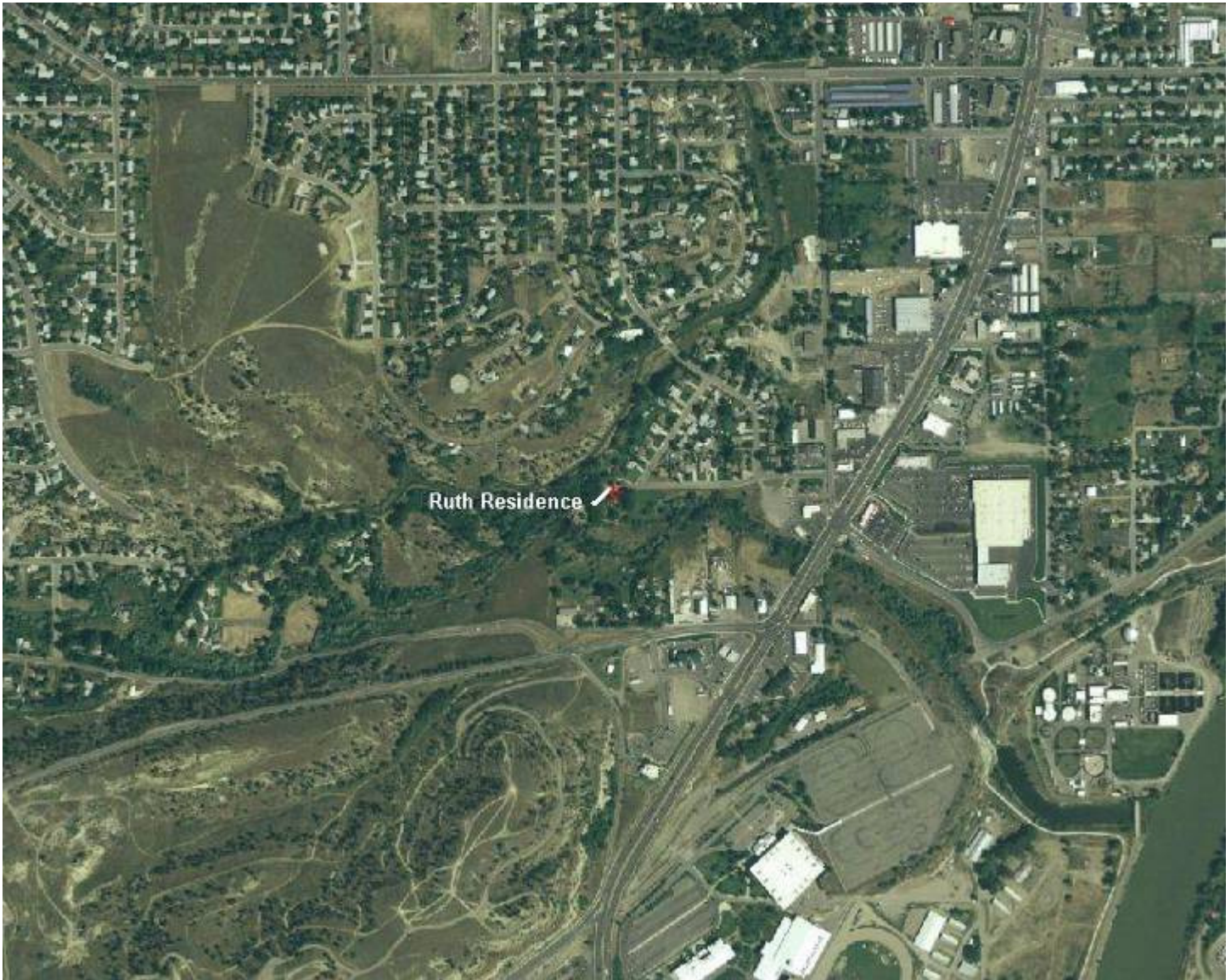
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2005 aerial view of Billings Heights, showing location of Ruth Residence.

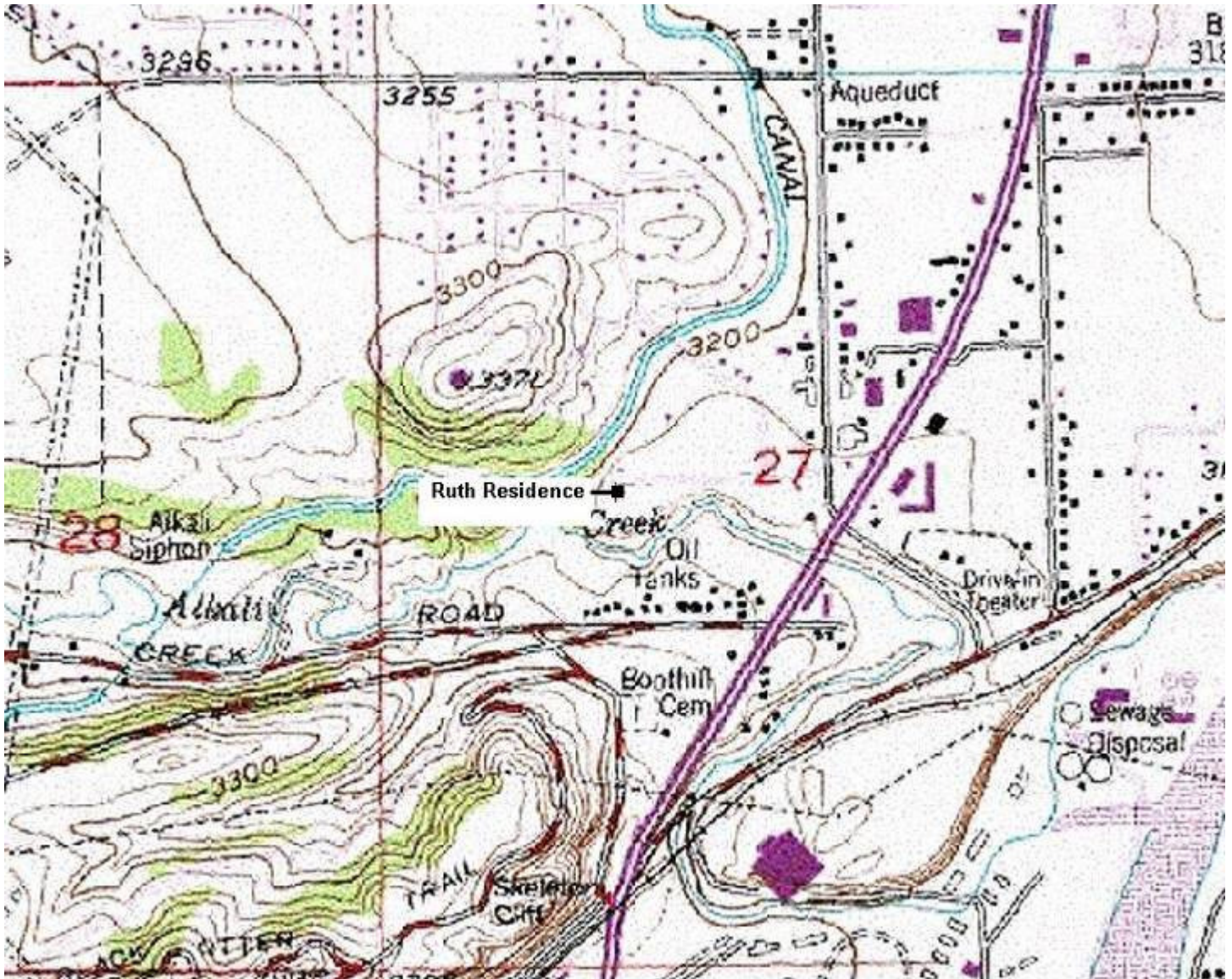
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Topo detail showing location of Ruth Residence.

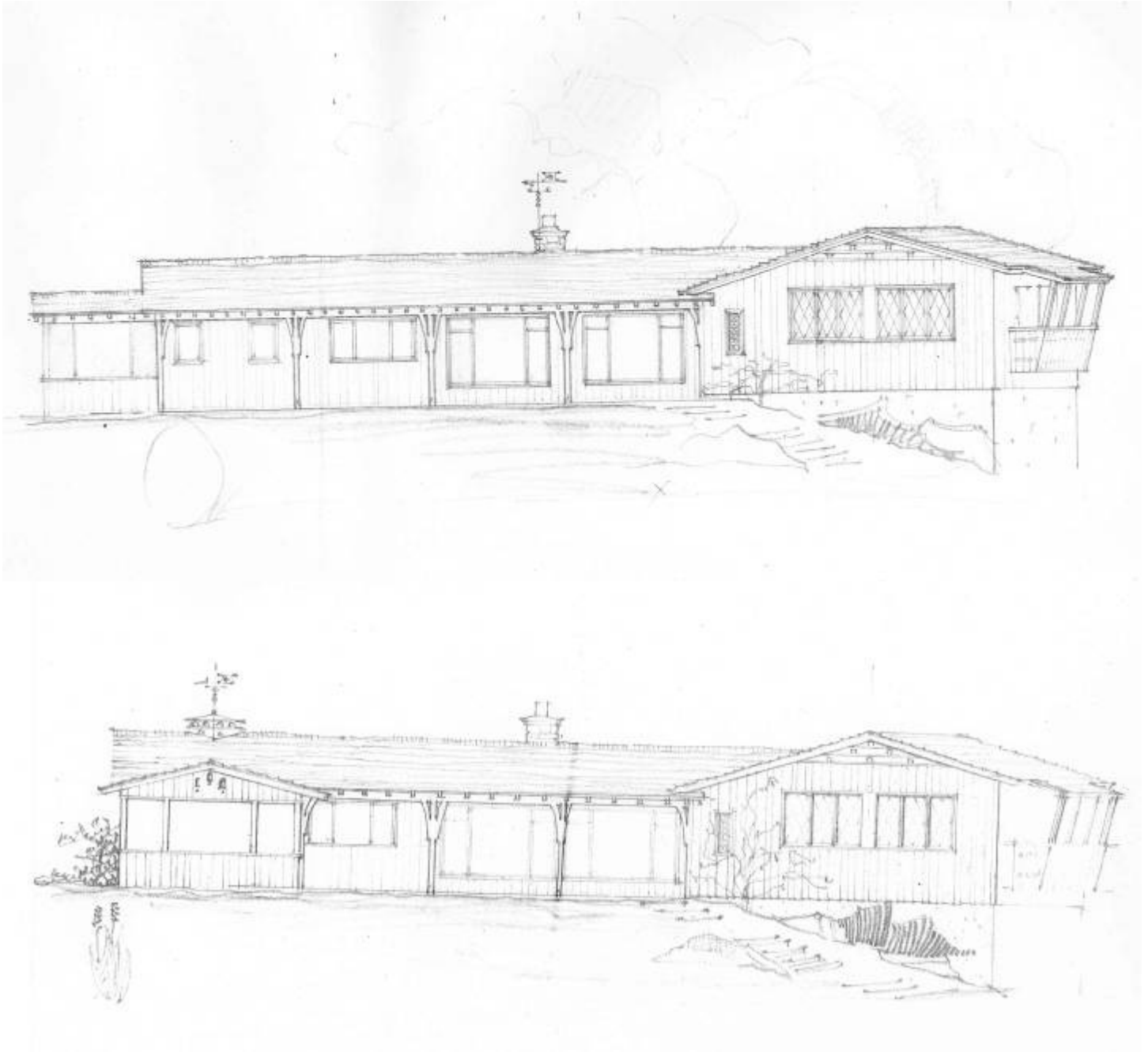
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Cushing and Terrell architectural drawings of Ruth Residence